

# UPDATE

---

## **The DASH Diet** **Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension**

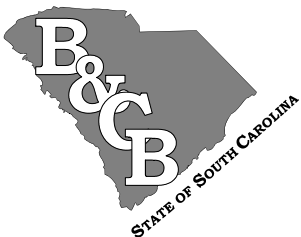
The effect of reducing dietary salt on controlling hypertension or high blood pressure has been surprisingly controversial. In a recent study, a collaboration of scientists, including researchers from Harvard Medical School and the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute of the National Institutes of Health, suggest that reducing salt intake may dramatically lower blood pressure in people with or without hypertension, regardless of age, race, or gender.

The trial, known as the Low-Sodium DASH Diet study, tested the effects on blood pressure of lower levels of sodium intake combined with the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet, which is low in fat and rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products. More than 400 subjects were assigned either a typical American diet or the DASH diet for 12 weeks. The salt content of every participant's diet was randomly changed every four weeks to one of three sodium levels: high (3,300 mg), intermediate (2,400 mg), or low (1,500 mg).

The researchers found that with either diet, the lower the salt intake - the lower the blood pressure. Nevertheless, at each sodium level, blood pressure was consistently lower for those on the DASH diet. Moreover, the largest reductions in blood pressure were found among those who followed the DASH diet while consuming 1,500 mg of salt per day, well below the government's recommended daily intake of 2,400 mg, or 1 ¼ teaspoons. This combination worked best for all participants, but particularly for patients with hypertension, whose systolic blood pressure was 11.5 millimeters of mercury (mm Hg) lower than hypertensive participants on the control diet with a high sodium level. The beneficial effect of a lower sodium diet was also more pronounced in women than men and in blacks than people of other races.

Controlling blood pressure reduces the risk of developing complications associated with hypertension, which include heart disease and stroke. New dietary guidelines from the American Heart Association recommend that everyone adopt an eating plan similar to the DASH diet and limit their sodium intake to less than 2,400 mg per day. Other things you can do to keep blood pressure in check include maintaining a healthy body weight, cutting down on dietary fat, and staying active.

For more information about the DASH studies and eating plan, visit the special web site at [www.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov) or write the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI) Health Information Center, P.O. Box 30105, Bethesda, MD 20824-0105.



**STATE HEALTH PLAN PREVENTION PARTNERS**  
**South Carolina Budget and Control Board**  
**Employee Insurance Program**  
**January 2002**